

# Being Aware of False Prophets

The world is full of false teachers and prophets. This is nothing new. As we continue our discussion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount we are talking about being aware of false prophets.

## Introduction

We have spent the last few weeks teaching from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount found in the gospel of Matthew chapters five through seven. The Sermon on the Mount is the best doctrinal teaching in the New Testament and deserves a lot of study time from all of us.

Jesus spoke on so many topics that all relate to daily Christian living and dependence on God. We are continuing this series by talking about being aware of false prophets or teachers. The world is filled with people who know how to manipulate and get what they want at others' expense. We need to know what to look for and how to determine if someone is a false prophet or teacher or a legitimate minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The things we need to do are: test the source, examine the fruits, and avoid what is bad.

Let's read Matthew 7:15-20.

## Matthew 7:15-20

(15) "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (16) By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (17) Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

God is calling us to be wise and discerning in our lives. We must be able to tell the difference between what is good and what is bad. Let's look at three practical steps from Jesus' words on how to discern good from bad. The first step to being aware of false prophets is to test the source.

## Test the Source

We must be aware of false prophets and the lies they tell. The devil has false prophets throughout the world. They preach and teach lies constantly. They use just enough scripture that they can twist to make what they are saying or teaching sound true, but it is not. We must test the source of what we are being taught and believing.

We can use Scripture as a reliable source to test what we hear and make sure it aligns with God's truth. We back up all of our teaching and doctrinal statements with scripture. Acts 17:11-12 says:

## Acts 17:11-12

(11) Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (12) As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.



The Bereans were a group of Jews who studied the scriptures day and night. They measured everything they were taught by the scriptures. As a result of their diligence in learning and examining the scriptures a great many people, both Jews and Greeks or Gentiles, came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We must test what we hear and read with scripture and see if it lines up. Be wary of people who only give their opinion and interpretation of scripture without a clear reading and understanding of the supporting scriptures.

The second step to being aware of false prophets is to examine the fruits.

### Examine the Fruits

There are a few ways to determine the type of a tree when we see it. Sometimes we can tell by the bark or the shape of the leaves. The most common way to see what kind of tree it is by looking at the fruit from the tree. A banana tree with bananas hanging from it looks much different from an apple tree with apples hanging from it. A tree is obviously a pine tree when pine cones are hanging from it.

Good fruit trees produce good fruit. It is pleasing to the eye and once it is ripe it tastes good, too. A bright red apple or a fresh fig hanging from a tree can make your mouth water. However, an apple with worm holes in it does not look appetizing at all and a tree that only grows small shriveled-up fruit is worthless.

We must look at the fruit of someone's words and actions to discern if it is good or bad. Galatians 5:22-23 says:

#### Galatians 5:22-23

- (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
- (23) gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

When someone's words or actions display these qualities, we can be sure it is good fruit. When someone's teaching displays these qualities, we can know it is good teaching. Just as an apple tree cannot grow a lemon and a banana tree cannot grow a fig, not everyone will display all of these fruits at the same time in their words or actions. However, what they display will be found in these fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The third step to being aware of false prophets is to avoid what is bad.

### Avoid What is Bad

Once we have tested the prophet, preacher, or teacher and what they are saying and compared it with scripture, and we have examined the fruit of their life and ministry, we can then avoid what is bad. Testing the source of doctrine and teaching and examining the fruit of the person sharing it helps us discern what is good and evil.

We must reject bad fruit and bad sources to live a life of wisdom and discernment. Proverbs 4:14-15 says:



## Proverbs 4:14-15

(14) Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. (15) Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

Notice how Proverbs does not tell us to avoid those people, just the path they walk and the way they do things. We must always be impacting everyone we can for good with the gospel of Jesus Christ and pointing them to Jesus. We cannot isolate ourselves into our groups and hope the Lord comes and destroys everyone else.

We have all been created by God for a plan and a purpose and the Lord has chosen each one of us to share his good news with this lost and dying world. We cannot do that if we isolate ourselves from it. But, Proverbs is clear. We should not walk in the way of the wicked or do the things that evildoers do.

The only way we can know what is good and what is evil is by testing the source of teaching and evaluating the spiritual fruit of the people we allow to speak into our lives. We also must do this so we can help others know who to listen to and follow and whose paths to avoid.

We must be sure to follow the path of the Lord. That path is not the wide and straight path, but the narrow path that winds. It is the gate that is narrow, not always the wide open door.

## Conclusion

Discernment is a gift from God that allows us to recognize what is good and reject what is bad. Christians must be able to discern good from evil, good from bad. We must use the tools God has given us. We need to measure everything we are taught against God's word, the Bible. We must evaluate the spiritual fruit shown by those we allow to lead us and speak into our lives. Finally, we must discern good from evil. Accept what is good and reject what is bad.

These take wisdom, and you cannot do it alone. God has not called any of us to walk this alone. You must spend time in scripture studying it. You must know the fruits of the Holy Spirit so you can evaluate someone's life and ministry. These will help you discern good from evil.

May we all be wise and discerning in our lives and choose what is good.

